THOUGHTS & IMAGES

ALBEDO

ANTHROPOMORPHICS

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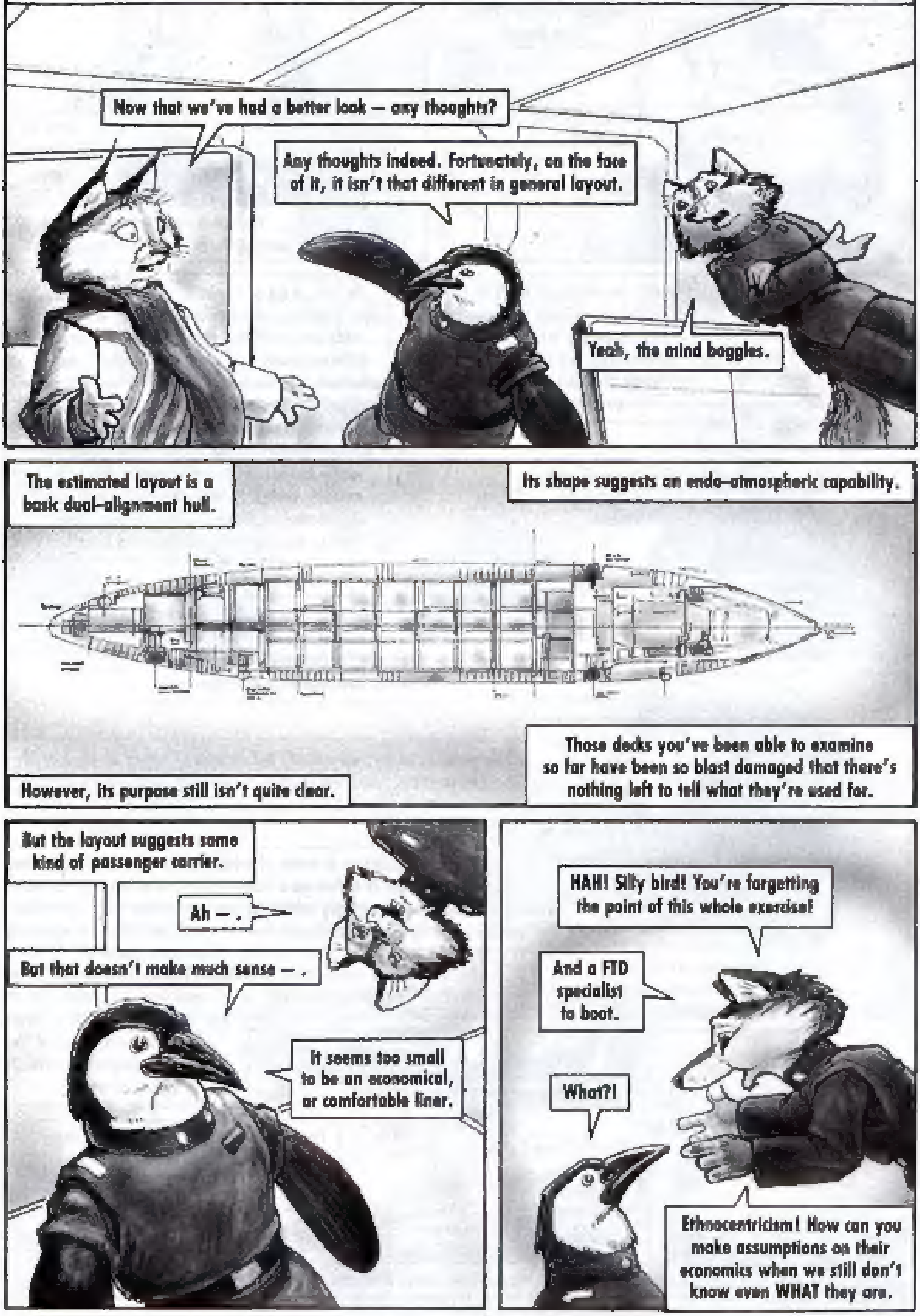
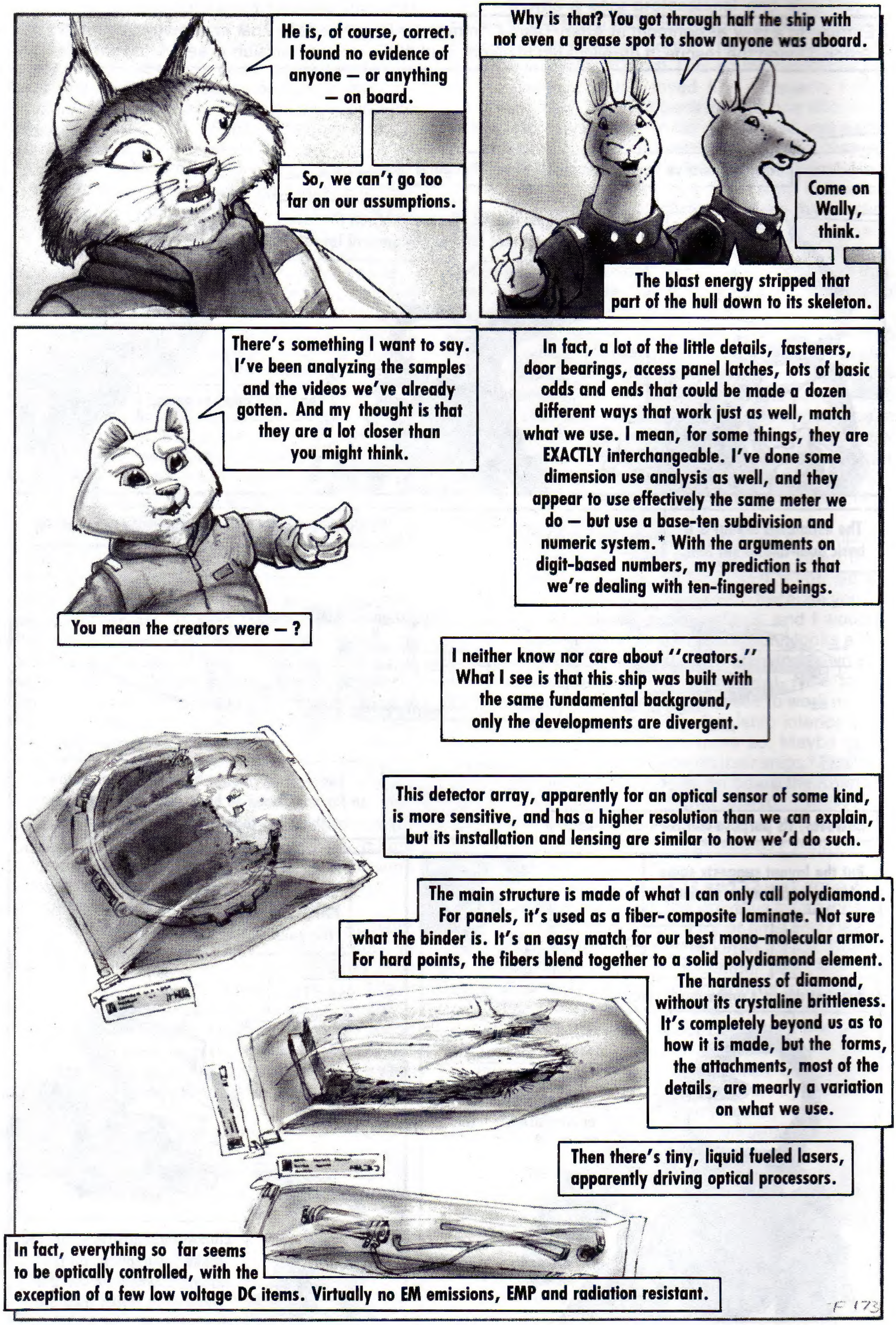
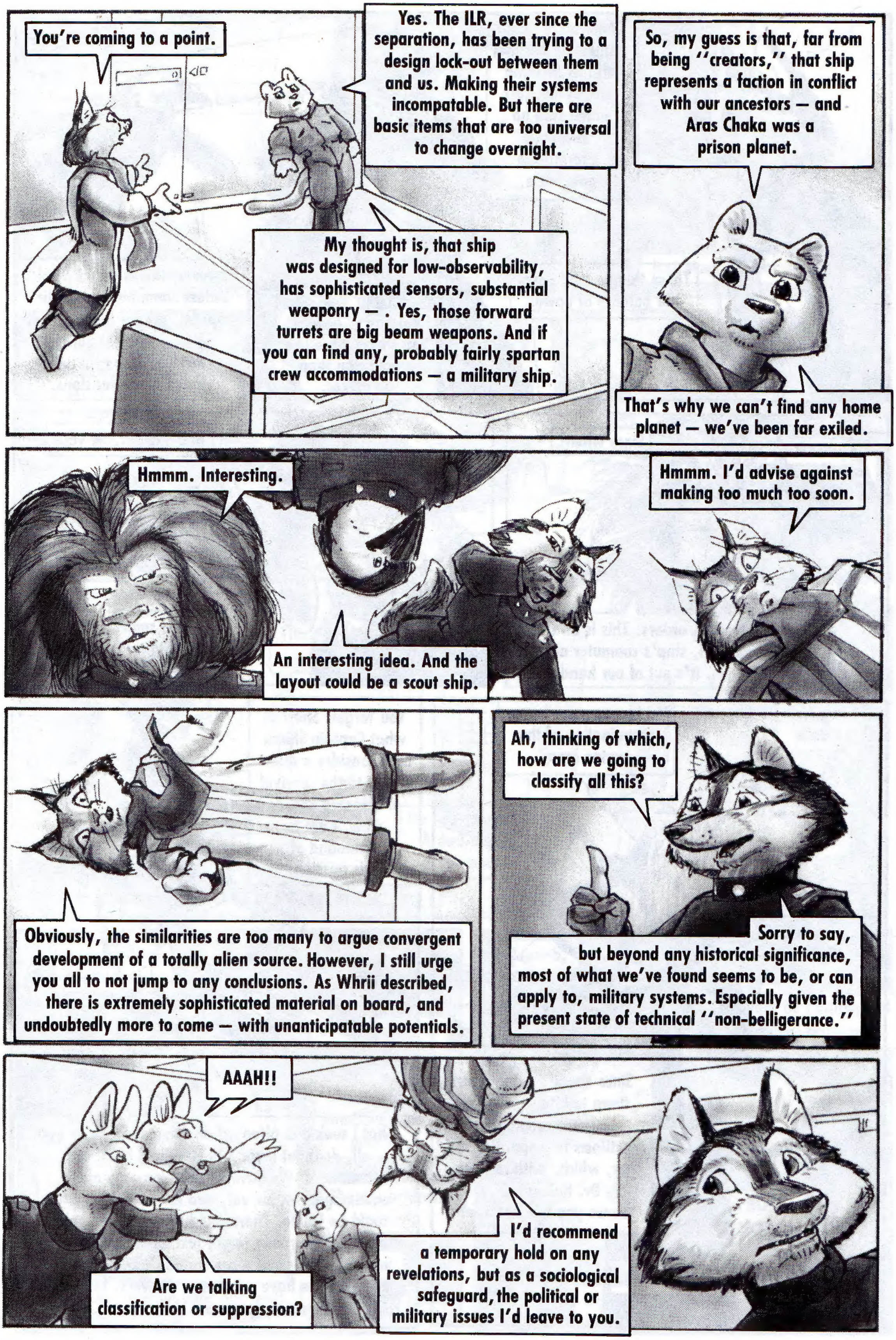
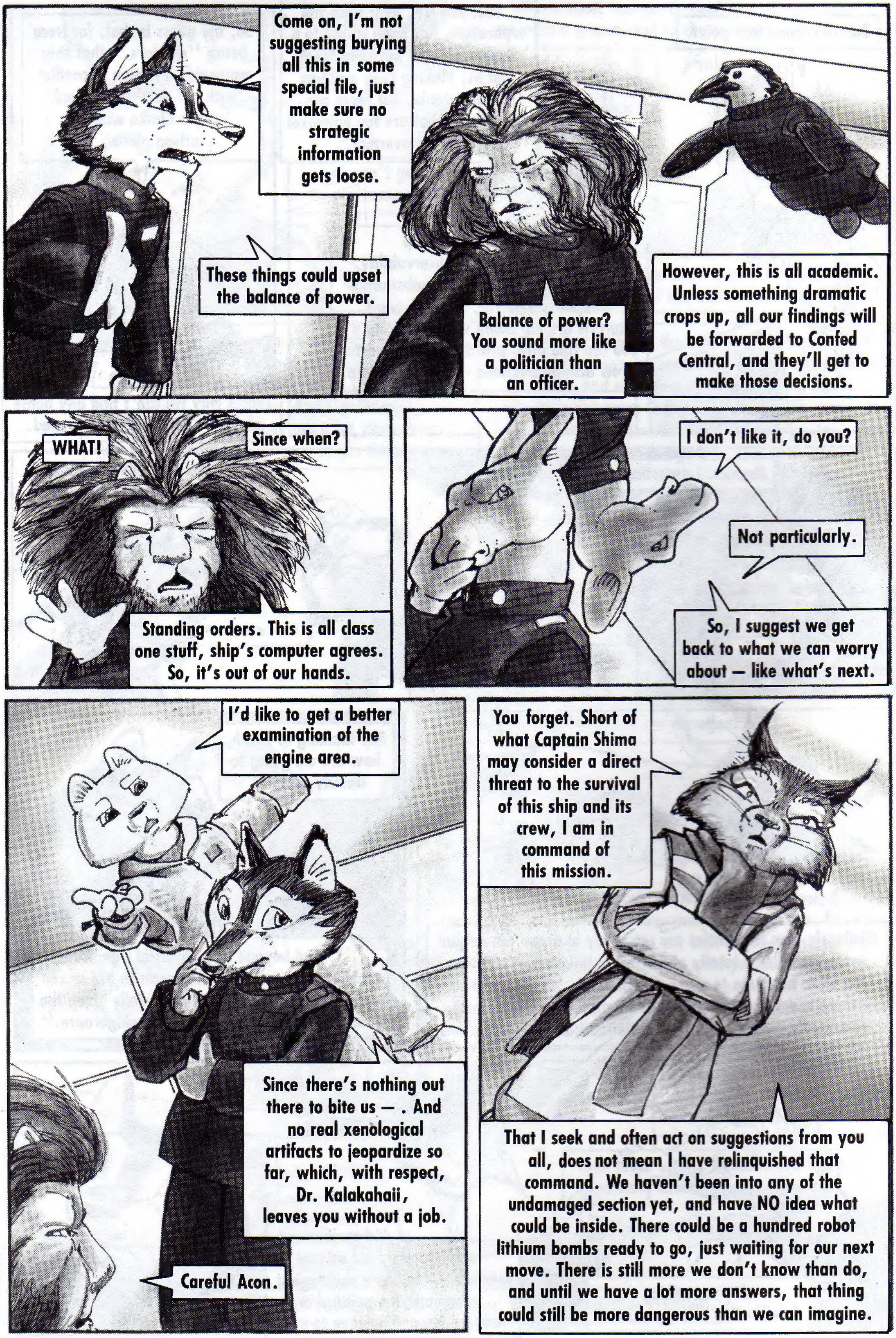
Enroute to a new assignment at Ahan-Tako, Commander Felna's space liner is damaged by hostile action. During the rescue, a derelict ship is discovered and a special mission is sent to investigate.

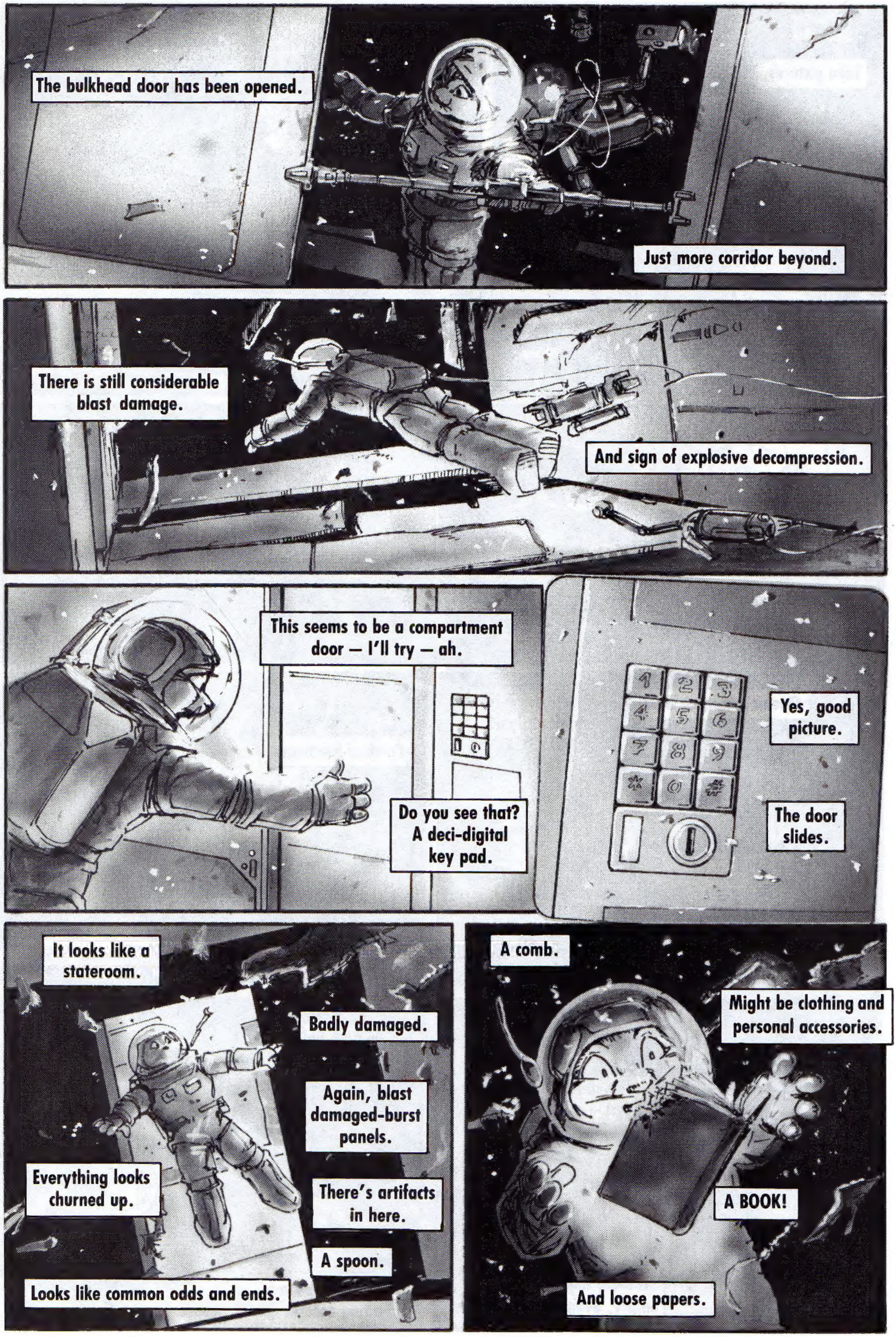

Now that we've had a better look — any thoughts?
Any thoughts indeed. Fortunately, on the face of it, it isn't that different in general layout.
Yeah, the mind boggles.
The estimated layout is a basic dual-alignment hull.
Its shape suggests an endo-atmospheric capability.
However, its purpose still isn't quite clear.
Those decks you've been able to examine so far have been so blast damaged that there's nothing left to tell what they're used for.
But the layout suggests some kind of passenger carrier.
Ah — .
But that doesn't make much sense — .
It seems too small to be an economical, or comfortable liner.
HAH! Silly bird! You're forgetting the point of this whole exercise!
And a FTD specialist to boot.
What?!
Ethnocentricism! How can you make assumptions on their economics when we still don't know even WHAT they are.

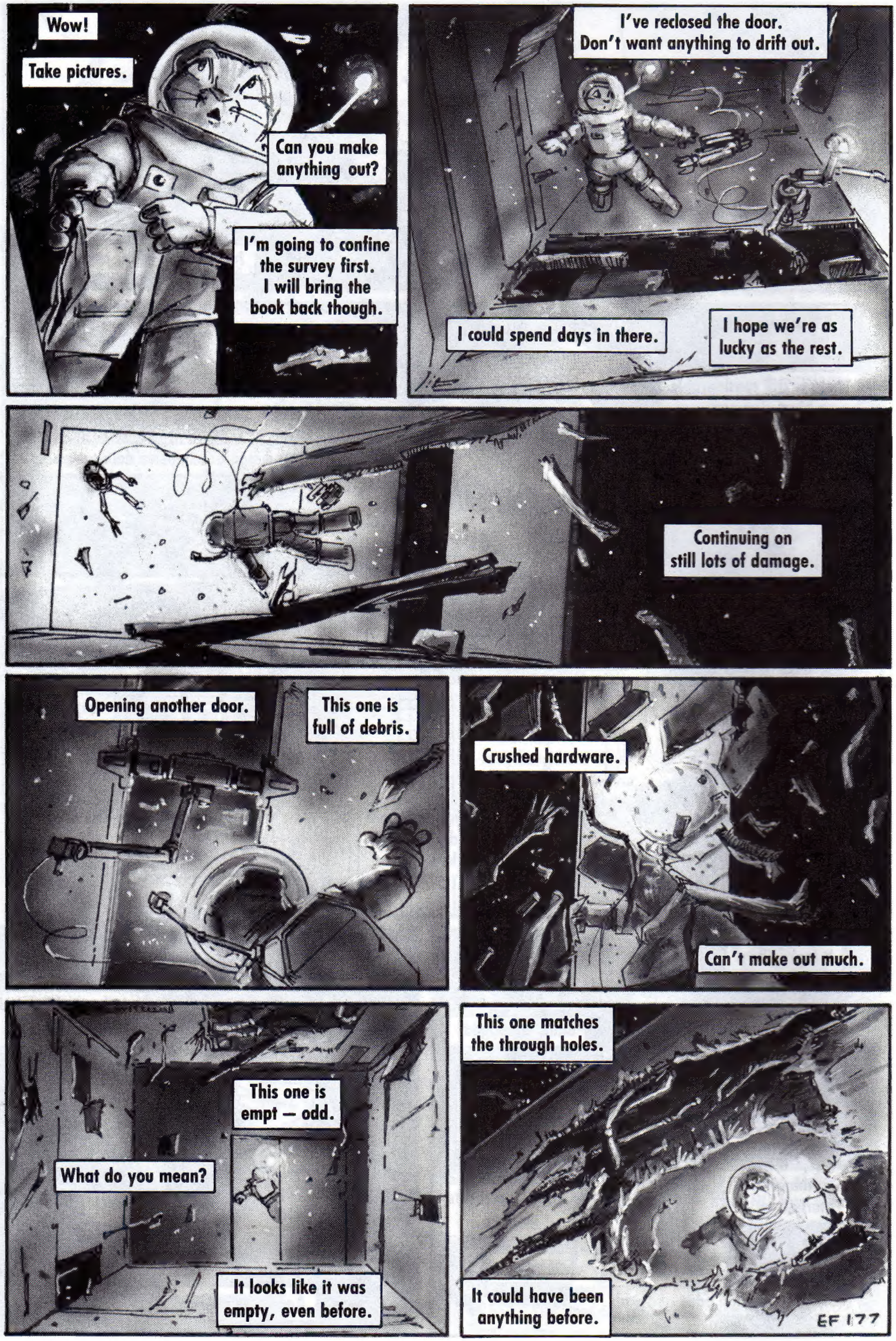

He is, of course, correct. I found no evidence of anyone — or anything — on board.
So, we can't go too far on our assumptions.
Why is that? You got through half the ship with not even a grease spot to show anyone was aboard.
Come on Wally, think.
The blast energy stripped that part of the hull down to its skeleton.
There's something I want to say. I've been analyzing the samples and the videos we've already gotten. And my thought is that they are a lot closer than you might think.
In fact, a lot of the little details, fasteners, door bearings, access panel latches, lots of basic odds and ends that could be made a dozen different ways that work just as well, match what we use. I mean, for some things, they are EXACTLY interchangeable. I've done some dimension use analysis as well, and they appear to use effectively the same meter we do — but use a base-ten subdivision and numeric system.* With the arguments on digit-based numbers, my prediction is that we're dealing with ten-fingered beings.
You mean the creators were — ?
I neither know nor care about ''creators.'' What I see is that this ship was built with the same fundamental background, only the developments are divergent.
This detector array, apparently for an optical sensor of some kind, is more sensitive, and has a higher resolution than we can explain, but its installation and lensing are similar to how we'd do such.
The main structure is made of what I can only call polydiamond. For panels, it's used as a fiber-composite laminate. Not sure what the binder is. It's an easy match for our best mono-molecular armor. For hard points, the fibers blend together to a solid polydiamond element.
The hardness of diamond, without its crystaline brittleness. It's completely beyond us as to how it is made, but the forms, the attachments, most of the details, are mearly a variation on what we use.
Then there's tiny, liquid fueled lasers, apparently driving optical processors.
In fact, everything so far seems to be optically controlled, with the exception of a few low voltage DC items. Virtually no EM emissions, EMP and radiation resistant.
F 173

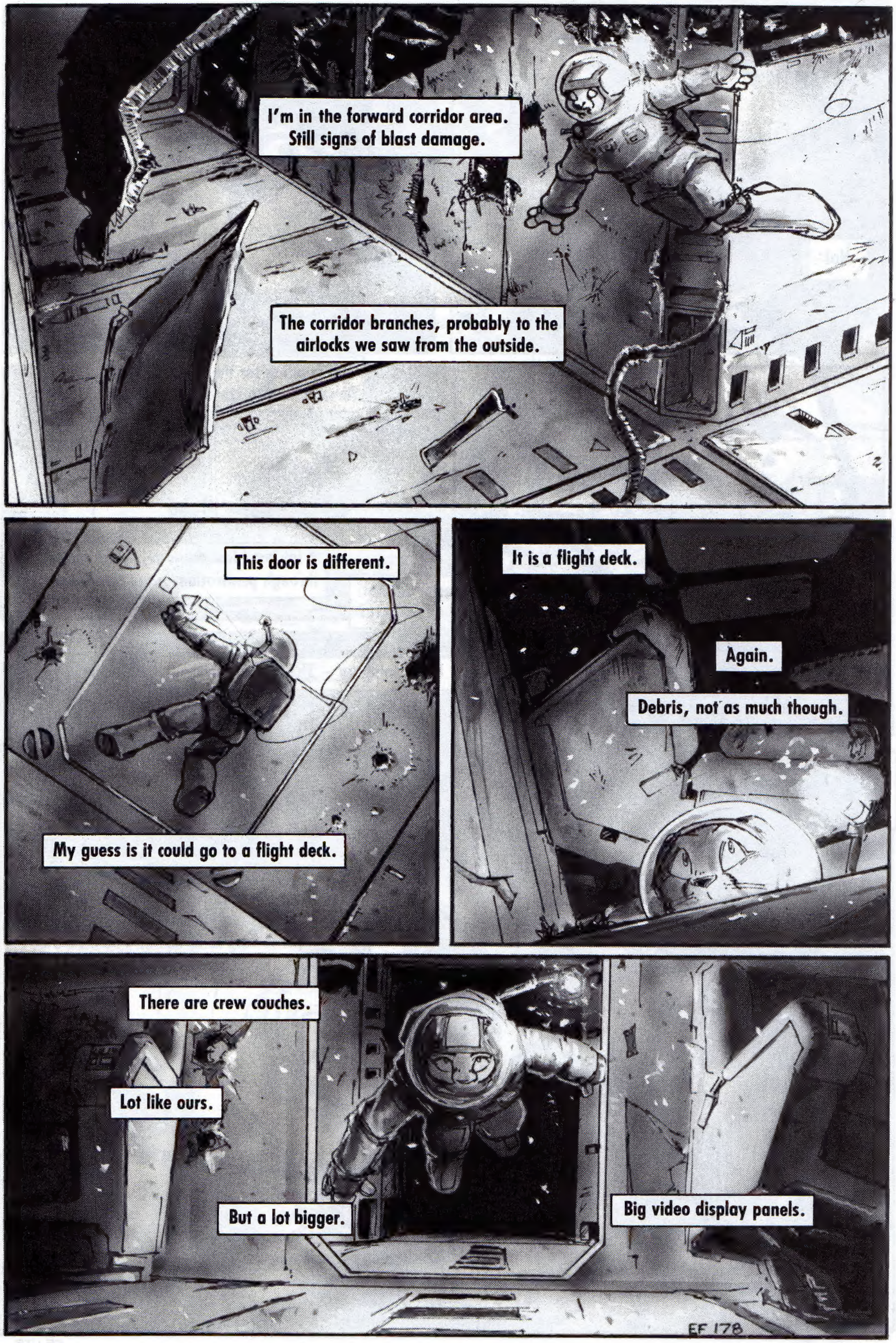
**Everyone here uses base-eight, conveniently translated by the author.*

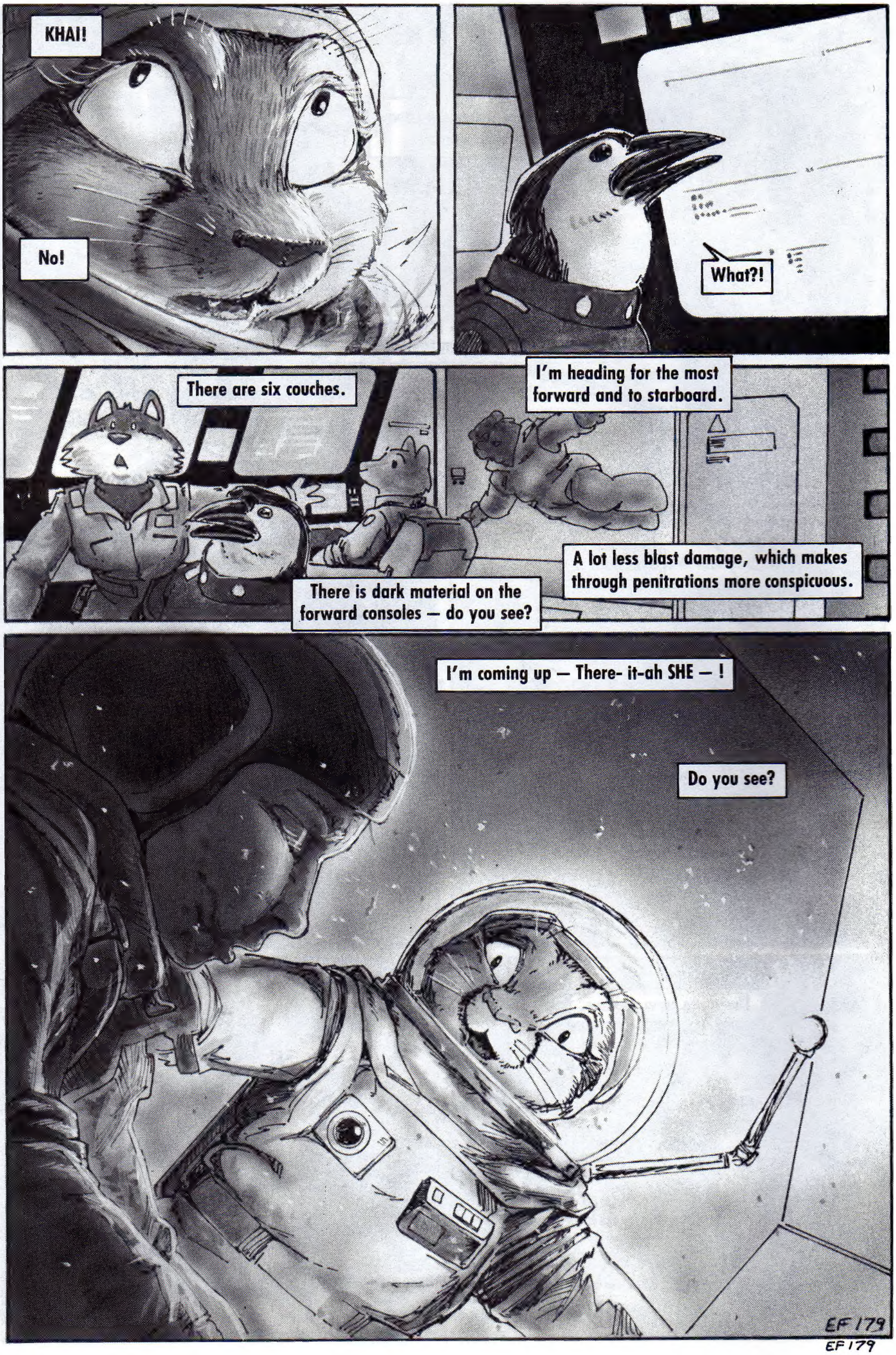

You're coming to a point.
Yes. The ILR, ever since the separation, has been trying to a design lock-out between them and us. Making their systems incompatable. But there are basic items that are too universal to change overnight.
My thought is, that ship was designed for low-observability, has sophisticated sensors, substantial weaponry — . Yes, those forward turrets are big beam weapons. And if you can find any, probably fairly spartan crew accommodations — a military ship.
So, my guess is that, far from being ''creators,'' that ship represents a faction in conflict with our ancestors — and Aras Chaka was a prison planet.
That's why we can't find any home planet — we've been far exiled.
Hmmm. Interesting.
An interesting idea. And the layout could be a scout ship.
Hmmm. I'd advise against making too much too soon.
Obviously, the similarities are too many to argue convergent development of a totally alien source. However, I still urge you all to not jump to any conclusions. As Whrii described, there is extremely sophisticated material on board, and undoubtedly more to come — with unanticipatable potentials.
Ah, thinking of which, how are we going to classify all this?
Sorry to say, but beyond any historical significance, most of what we've found seems to be, or can apply to, military systems. Especially given the present state of technical ''non-belligerance.''
AAAH!!
Are we talking classification or suppression?
I'd recommend a temporary hold on any revelations, but as a sociological safeguard, the political or military issues I'd leave to you.


Come on, I'm not suggesting burying all this in some special file, just make sure no strategic information gets loose.
These things could upset the balance of power.
Balance of power? You sound more like a politician than an officer.
However, this is all academic. Unless something dramatic crops up, all our findings will be forwarded to Confed Central, and they'll get to make those decisions.
WHAT!
Since when?
Standing orders. This is all class one stuff, ship's computer agrees. So, it's out of our hands.
I don't like it, do you?
Not particularly.
So, I suggest we get back to what we can worry about — like what's next.
I'd like to get a better examination of the engine area.
Since there's nothing out there to bite us — . And no real xenological artifacts to jeopardize so far, which, with respect, Dr. Kalakahaii, leaves you without a job.
Careful Acon.
You forget. Short of what Captain Shima may consider a direct threat to the survival of this ship and its crew, I am in command of this mission.
That I seek and often act on suggestions from you all, does not mean I have relinquished that command. We haven't been into any of the undamaged section yet, and have NO idea what could be inside. There could be a hundred robot lithium bombs ready to go, just waiting for our next move. There is still more we don't know than do, and until we have a lot more answers, that thing could still be more dangerous than we can imagine.

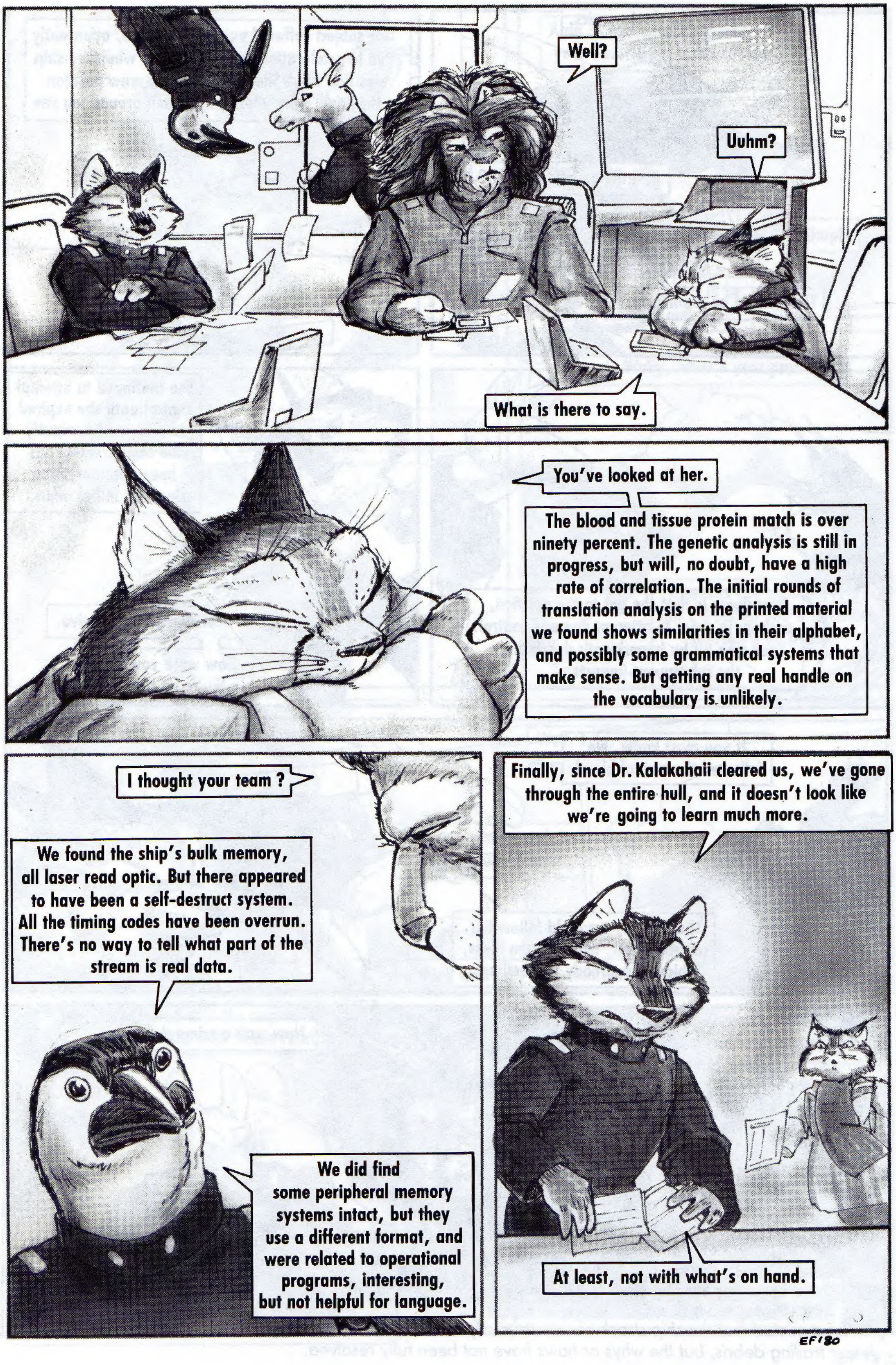

The bulkhead door has been opened.
Just more corridor beyond.
There is still considerable blast damage.
And sign of explosive decompression.
This seems to be a compartment door — I'll try — ah.
Do you see that? A deci-digital key pad.
Yes, good picture.
The door slides.
It looks like a stateroom.
Badly damaged.
Again, blast damaged-burst panels.
Everything looks churned up.
There's artifacts in here.
A spoon.
Looks like common odds and ends.
A comb.
Might be clothing and personal accessories.
A BOOK!
And loose papers.

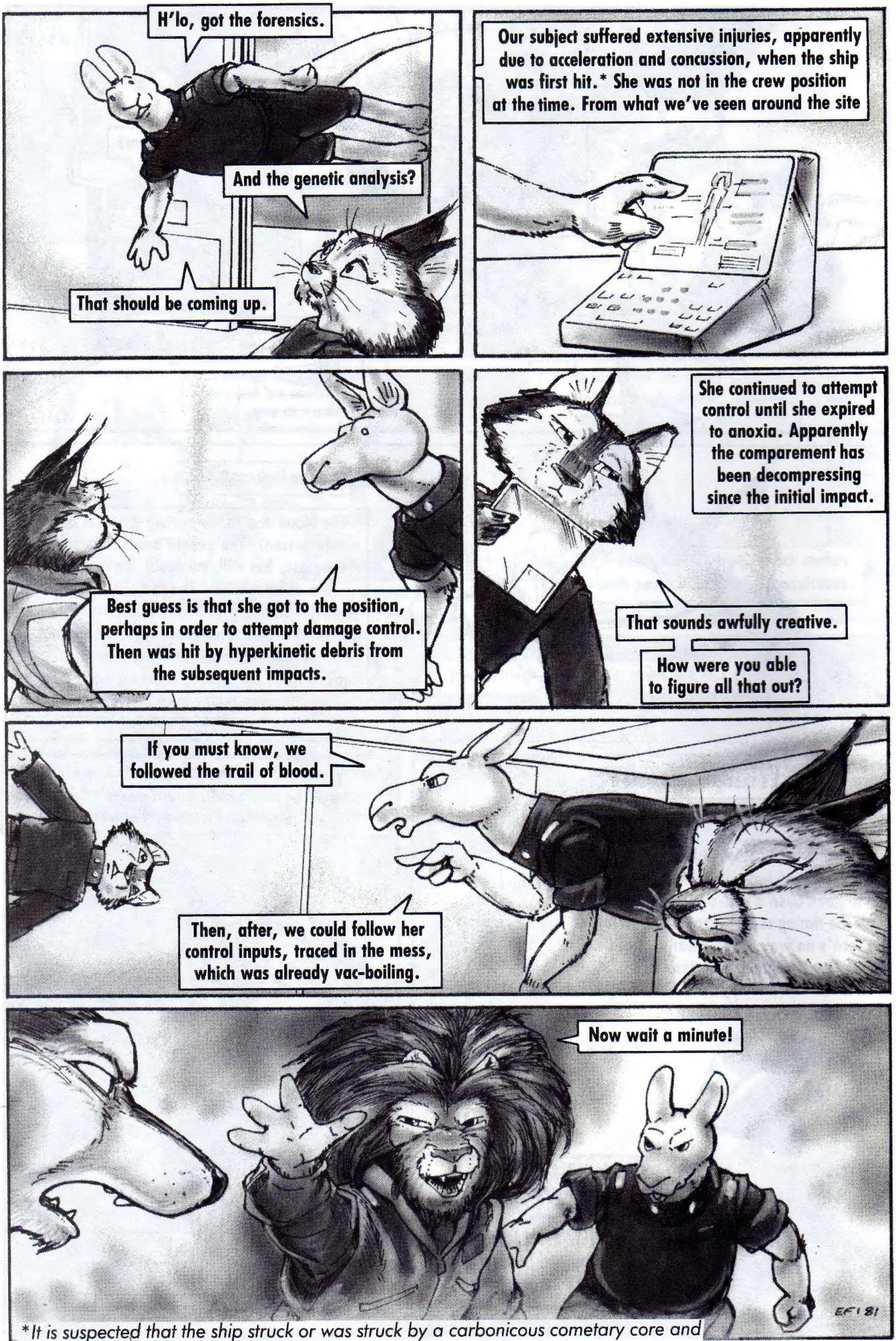

Wow!
Take pictures.
Can you make anything out?
I'm going to confine the survey first. I will bring the book back though.
I've reclosed the door. Don't want anything to drift out.
I could spend days in there.
I hope we're as lucky as the rest.
Continuing on still lots of damage.
Opening another door.
This one is full of debris.
Crushed hardware.
Can't make out much.
This one is empt — odd.
What do you mean?
It looks like it was empty, even before.
This one matches the through holes.
It could have been anything before.
EF 177


I'm in the forward corridor area. Still signs of blast damage.
The corridor branches, probably to the airlocks we saw from the outside.
This door is different.
My guess is it could go to a flight deck.
It is a flight deck.
Again.
Debris, not as much though.
There are crew couches.
Lot like ours.
But a lot bigger.
Big video display panels.
EF 178

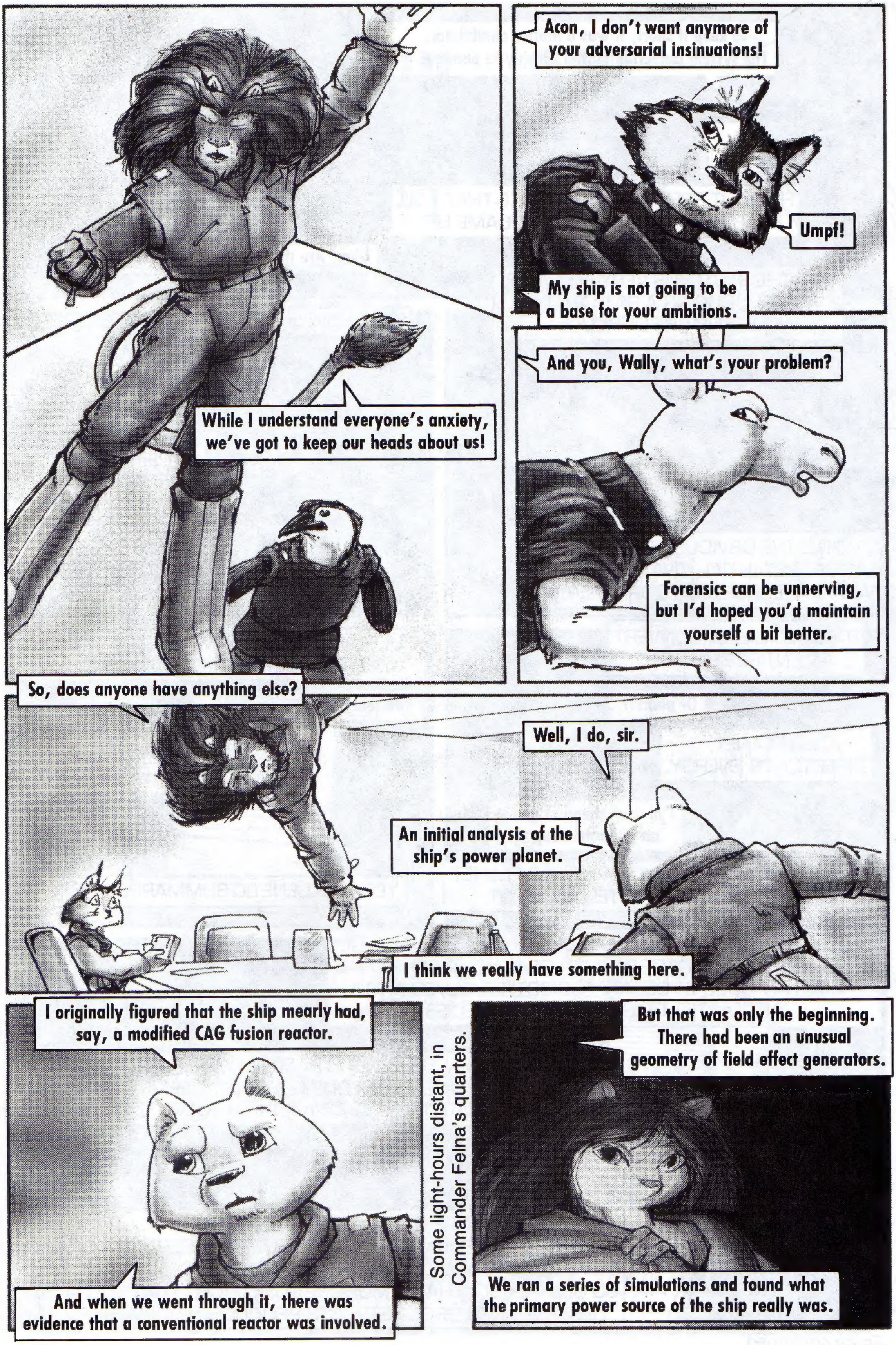

KHAI!
No!
What?!
There are six couches.
I'm heading for the most forward and to starboard.
There is dark material on the forward consoles — do you see?
A lot less blast damage, which makes through penitrations more conspicuous.
I'm coming up — There- it-ah SHE — !
Do you see?
EF 179

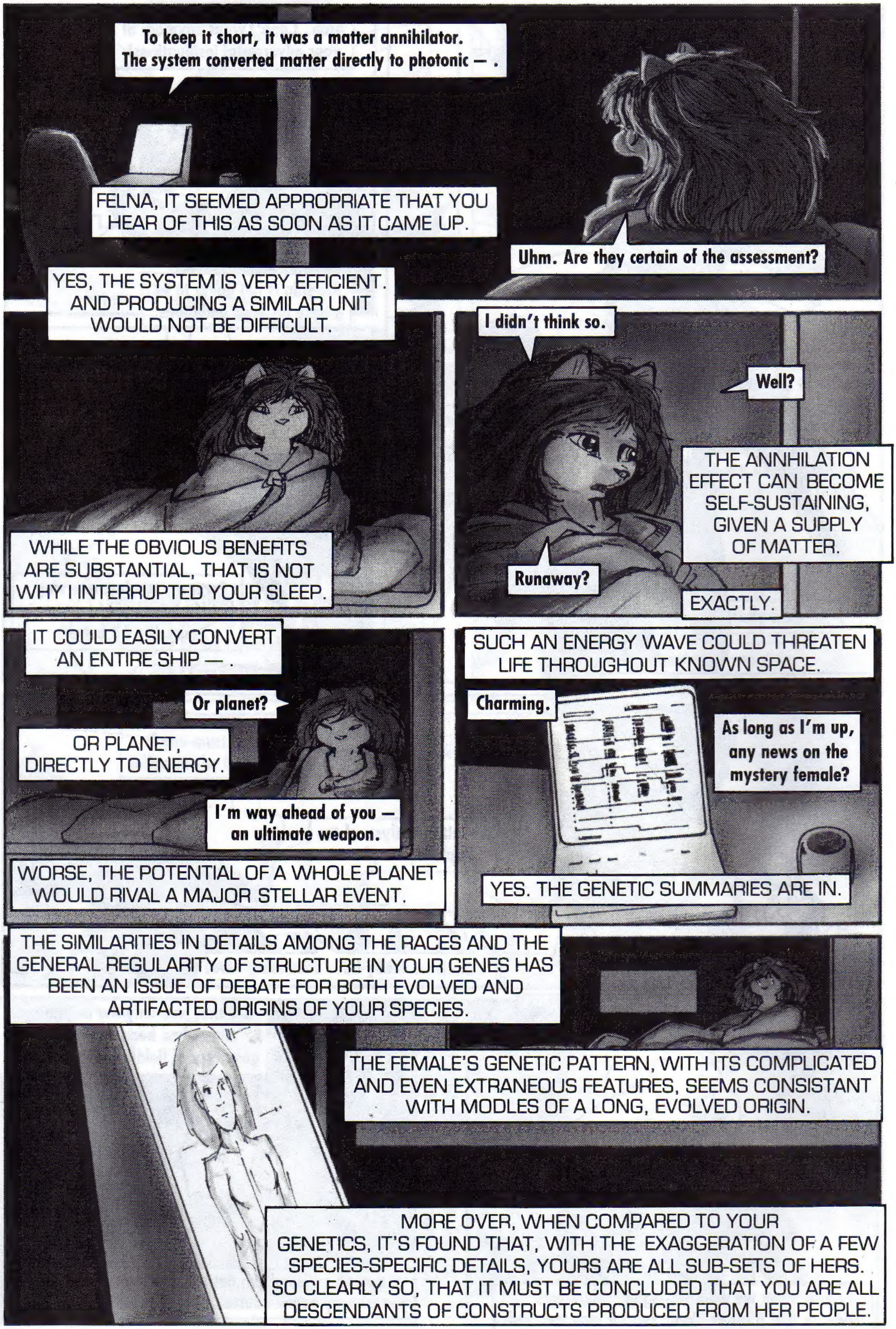
EF 179


Well?
Uuhm?
What is there to say.
You've looked at her.
The blood and tissue protein match is over ninety percent. The genetic analysis is still in progress, but will, no doubt, have a high rate of correlation. The initial rounds of translation analysis on the printed material we found shows similarities in their alphabet, and possibly some grammatical systems that make sense. But getting any real handle on the vocabulary is unlikely.
I thought your team ?
We found the ship's bulk memory, all laser read optic. But there appeared to have been a self-destruct system. All the timing codes have been overrun. There's no way to tell what part of the stream is real data.
We did find some peripheral memory systems intact, but they use a different format, and were related to operational programs, interesting, but not helpful for language.
Finally, since Dr. Kalakahaii cleared us, we've gone through the entire hull, and it doesn't look like we're going to learn much more.
At least, not with what's on hand.
EF'80


H'lo, got the forensics.
And the genetic analysis?
That should be coming up.
Our subject suffered extensive injuries, apparently due to acceleration and concussion, when the ship was first hit.* She was not in the crew position at the time. From what we've seen around the site
Best guess is that she got to the position, perhaps in order to attempt damage control. Then was hit by hyperkinetic debris from the subsequent impacts.
She continued to attempt control until she expired to anoxia. Apparently the comparement has been decompressing since the initial impact.
That sounds awfully creative.
How were you able to figure all that out?
If you must know, we followed the trail of blood.
Then, after, we could follow her control inputs, traced in the mess, which was already vac-boiling.
Now wait a minute!
EF'81

It is suspected that the ship struck or was struck by a carbonicous cometary core and lesser trailing debris, but the whys or hows have not been fully resolved.


While I understand everyone's anxiety, we've got to keep our heads about us!
Acon, I don't want anymore of your adversarial insinuations!
Umpf!
My ship is not going to be a base for your ambitions.
And you, Wally, what's your problem?
Forensics can be unnerving, but I'd hoped you'd maintain yourself a bit better.
So, does anyone have anything else?
Well, I do, sir.
An initial analysis of the ship's power planet.
I think we really have something here.
I originally figured that the ship mearly had, say, a modified CAG fusion reactor.
And when we went through it, there was evidence that a conventional reactor was involved.
Some light-hours distant, in Commander Felna's quarters.
But that was only the beginning. There had been an unusual geometry of field effect generators.
We ran a series of simulations and found what the primary power source of the ship really was.


To keep it short, it was a matter annihilator. The system converted matter directly to photonic — .
FELNA, IT SEEMED APPROPRIATE THAT YOU HEAR OF THIS AS SOON AS IT CAME UP.
Uhm. Are they certain of the assessment?
YES, THE SYSTEM IS VERY EFFICIENT. AND PRODUCING A SIMILAR UNIT WOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT.
WHILE THE OBVIOUS BENEFITS ARE SUBSTANTIAL, THAT IS NOT WHY I INTERRUPTED YOUR SLEEP.
I didn't think so.
Well?
THE ANNHILATION EFFECT CAN BECOME SELF-SUSTAINING, GIVEN A SUPPLY OF MATTER.
Runaway?
EXACTLY.
IT COULD EASILY CONVERT AN ENTIRE SHIP — .
Or planet?
OR PLANET, DIRECTLY TO ENERGY.
I'm way ahead of you — an ultimate weapon.
WORSE, THE POTENTIAL OF A WHOLE PLANET WOULD RIVAL A MAJOR STELLAR EVENT.
SUCH AN ENERGY WAVE COULD THREATEN LIFE THROUGHOUT KNOWN SPACE.
Charming.
As long as I'm up, any news on the mystery female?
YES. THE GENETIC SUMMARIES ARE IN.
THE SIMILARITIES IN DETAILS AMONG THE RACES AND THE GENERAL REGULARITY OF STRUCTURE IN YOUR GENES HAS BEEN AN ISSUE OF DEBATE FOR BOTH EVOLVED AND ARTIFACTED ORIGINS OF YOUR SPECIES.
THE FEMALE'S GENETIC PATTERN, WITH ITS COMPLICATED AND EVEN EXTRANEOUS FEATURES, SEEMS CONSISTANT WITH MODLES OF A LONG, EVOLVED ORIGIN.
MORE OVER, WHEN COMPARED TO YOUR GENETICS, IT'S FOUND THAT, WITH THE EXAGGERATION OF A FEW SPECIES-SPECIFIC DETAILS, YOURS ARE ALL SUB-SETS OF HERS. SO CLEARLY SO, THAT IT MUST BE CONCLUDED THAT YOU ARE ALL DESCENDANTS OF CONSTRUCTS PRODUCED FROM HER PEOPLE.

To be continued.